Download date: 11. Şub. 2026

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Published in:
Journal of international relations and development

Publication date:
2001

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication

Citation for pulished version (APA):
Guzzini, S. (2001). The Significance and Roles of Teaching Theory in International Relations. *Journal of international relations and development*, *4*(2), 98-117.

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Stefano Guzzini

The Significance and Roles of Teaching Theory in International Relations

Introduction

With the increasing independence of the field of study called International Relations (IR) and the professionalisation of its teaching, theory courses have acquired a more prominent place in the newer curricula. Some observers have started to question whether this can be justified. Criticism against an overly theoretical nature of the studies typically revolves around one central theme. Theory is said to be most divorced from practice. Hence, for teaching to be useful in the real world of the future practitioner, it should recoil from (pure) theory courses and emphasise applied studies (Wallace 1996).

This article tries to show that such an argument is based on an erroneous understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, and of the specific roles theory can play in the education of practitioners. For it conflates the theory/practice distinction with the academia/politics distinction. Hence, theory seems to be coupled with the "ivory tower" of academia, whereas applied studies are linked to (diplomatic) practice. Although some theoretical work will undeniably be scholastic, and some empirical work of practical use, this is not necessarily so. A quick look at much of the empirical literature in IR in, for instance, *International Studies Quarterly* or the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, bears witness to the remoteness of applied studies from any direct practical value. On the other hand, theoretical research is of great political significance and commands public interest as, for example, democratic theory or theories of globalisation.

This article will reveal the neglected roles that the teaching of theory in IR can fulfil. These roles support the claim that there is a strong need for teaching (and researching) theory in IR. Indeed, this article will argue that thinking in terms of these very oppositions between theory/practice and academia/politics is part of the problem for understanding the role of academic education in IR today. For they lure us into the illusion that empirical studies can ever be divorced from theory, and that university education is only there to serve the policy relevance of the day and not the intellectual breadth and maturity of future practitioners.

My first argument is logical: no empirical analysis is without theoretical assumptions, without a framework of analysis. There is no explanation that is simply a neutral selection of "data speaking to

JIRD (2001) 4(2), 98-117
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us". Related to this is the dual character of theoretical knowledge: it is both explanatory and constitutive (Smith 1995:27-8). In its classical explanatory sense, social science theories are the result of knowledge giving a common, more general and coherent explanation for a variety of specified cases. But this does not exhaust the function of theories. Theories also have a constitutive function; *i.e.* a theory is the condition for the very possibility of knowledge. Without concepts that cut through the forest of empirical data, we would be unable to see the wood for the trees. Theories are not just the result but also the precondition for the possibility of empirical knowledge.

My second argument is educational: making future practitioners and observers aware of the constitutive function of theories fulfils the crucial role of a more time-independent intellectual education. As mentioned by Wallace (1996:317), the diplomat in the United Kingdom used to be trained through classical studies that gave them the general and time-independent skills to decipher and respond to changing political situations. The point here is simply that today we need to update this approach. Besides the necessary factual training in international law, history, economics, and politics, future observers and practitioners in international affairs (who might not necessarily be public servants) need to acquire the skill of intellectual self-distance, reflexivity as it were, to respond to changing challenges. Moreover, this ability and the related capacity to reflect on one's own and another's assumptions are crucial for the tasks of understanding and negotiating across national boundaries.

On the basis of these two arguments, I will consider the role that teaching and research in theory can play for entire academic communities. The article will try to show that the neglect of theoretical studies can cement the peripheral position in which the majority of academic communities find themselves today. If not opposed, the international division of academic labour tends to slot them into mere data providers and thought-takers. Theoretical expertise is, as some cases show, part of the way out.

Finally, I sketch out some of the implications this understanding of the roles of theory in teaching IR has on the type of theory teaching. I identify and discuss a non-exhaustive list of four types of courses where the constitutive function of theories is fruitfully addressed.

A Logical Argument: The Constitutive Nature of Theory and the Necessarily Theoretical Nature of All Knowledge

> *There is sometimes an assumption that 'theory' is something that is suitable only for 'advanced' students. The fear is that students are not interested in theory, that they study IR with a practical orientation and become alienated if asked to think conceptually and abstractly, and, most damagingly, that students want to be told the 'right' answers and not to be exposed to the scandalous fact that authorities differ even on quite basic issues. These positions must be resisted. All understandings of IR and of the other social sciences are necessarily theoretical, the only issue is whether this is made explicit or not and most good students are well aware that this is so* (Brown 1997:vii).

How do we know what we know? This seems an arcane question and yet it is the basic question for establishing the fundamental identity of an observer or a scientist. For it allows us to justify why we believe something to be true. Teaching, in turn, has to do with the communication

of this knowledge — both its content and its means of justification.

This position makes it very difficult to conceive of science and teaching in a simplistic, empiricist manner. By simplistic empiricism, I understand the position that "data speaks for itself", that is, that we can neutrally access empirical data. There is hardly anybody who subscribes to such a position in the philosophy of science, positivists included. Any empirical explanation relies on *a priori* concepts. The question then becomes whether the choice of such concepts, albeit necessary, can be neutral or innocent with regard to the event to be explained.

Going after the business of empirical research, some scholars, however, tend to bracket those questions. In IR, possibly the most famous research programme in this more empiricist tradition is the Correlates of War Project. This project is led by David J. Singer, who has succeeded in obtaining an almost incredible amount of resources over the last few decades, seeks to find out which antecedent conditions correlate with war.[1] The project is based on a huge historical database of international conflicts for which we have enough information to code them. It is inductively driven in that it wants to derive knowledge from empirical correlations. In other words, our knowledge is based on empirical generalisations of which antecedent events correlate with war. In its self-understanding, this is the only possible way to get unbiased information.[2]

Apparently absent, theory enters twice into this type of explanation. First, as empiricists themselves stress, theory is needed since these correlations do not explain anything in the strict sense of the word. For they do not answer the question of why things correlate. Only an argument about causes can help us find out whether the correlations are spurious, or whether they are the social science equivalent of laws. It might be added that even economists, admittedly institutional ones, are not that certain whether social sciences can actually find these more general theories. Richter (1994), one of the *doyens* of institutionalist economics, has likened economics not to physics, but to medicine where we still do not know the causes, say, of rheumatism, but have (*via* trial and error) discovered ways to mitigate its effects.

More importantly perhaps, theories enter the analysis already before or rather for the establishment of these correlations. As already mentioned, we need concepts to code these events. Without concepts as meaningful data-containers (Sartori 1970), we cannot distinguish music (a meaningful fact) from sheer noise (the totality of information) in world history. In other words, pure induction is not possible. In turn, such concepts simply cannot be divorced from theoretical or pre-theoretical assumptions. This is also called the necessary theory-dependence of facts. How do we know, for instance, that the things we compare over the millennia, and which we label with the same concept (in this case, war) are actually the same? Did they mean the same to the actors then and now? The very possibility of "conceptual stretching" (Sartori 1970; Collier and Mahon 1993) is dependent on certain assumptions about history and/or human nature, for instance.

This criticism of empiricism does not necessarily imply that reality can be reduced to what we think about it. In the natural world, reality itself does impose limits on the way we can understand it. In the social world, which is more of "our" making, not every explanation will reach at least some intersubjective consent as being plausible.[3] Hence, if pure induction is impossible, if facts are always theory-

dependent, this does not mean that the real world can be meaningfully described in a completely arbitrary way. The offshoot of the previous discussion is neither that there is only one true explanation for everything nor that "anything goes", but that there can be a series of plausible and theoretically founded explanations for which, at any given time, we might not have enough evidence to decide between. Indeed, to put it more strongly, it cannot be excluded that these explanations will approach the apparently same project from very different angles, asking often incompatible research questions about it. In this case, there would be no common evidence against which we could make a final assessment.

This should not be confused with a related argument that ideologies imbue empirical research and that ultimately no justified choice between such ideologies can be made. This reading of the theory-dependence of facts is a very lazy attempt to stop any scholarly communication between, instead of just among, true believers (Guzzini 1988). Such a reading has been reinforced by the classical American way of framing IR/International Political Economy theories according to the triad of political ideologies in the United States (US): conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism. But such a confusion of (a particular national) ideological debate with meta-theoretical assumptions is not warranted. There is, for instance, no reason to assume that conservatives will necessarily link up with realism. Keohane (1989) was perfectly right that one can be both a realist (in IR) and a liberal (in political terms). More importantly, it is a matter for debate to establish whether ideologies really distort empirical analysis beyond a common ground. So-called realists and idealists in the classical IR tradition shared many of their assumptions about the international system; hence, they were able to analyse the state of affairs in a very similar way. They could differ about the question of whether or not this was a state of affairs to stay unchanged.

Instead, the importance of constitutive theorising and concept-formation better shows in the now inflamed discussion about what led to the end of the Cold War.[4] The interpretation of this event can already start with the exact dating.[5] Similarly to the debate on the origins of the Cold War, where scholars put the date at 1917 (Fontaine 1965) or 1945 or 1947, the end of the Cold War has been dated at 1985 (the rise of Gorbachev to power), 1987 (for some, the actual policy turn in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic — USSR; *e.g.* McGwire 1991), or more commonly 1989 (the fall of the Berlin Wall, either symbolising the end of the Eastern bloc or the commitment to change), and 1991 (the end of the Soviet Union). As with the nature of the Cold War, the dating here reflects whether the Cold War is seen as clash of ideologies or of superpowers, and whether individuals or structures play a role in world politics. The very interpretation of what the Cold War was becomes an issue which cannot be taken for granted when asking the question.

The answers to the question are similarly imbued by theoretical assumptions. Those who see the end in the final demise of the Soviet challenge to the US supremacy will have a materialist understanding of power, most saliently the new round of the arms race launched by the first Reagan administration. The USSR, so the story goes, was forced to give in. Apparently, the pure material power figures are, however, too vague to allow such an interpretation, even for realists themselves.[6] Therefore, some realists rescue themselves by saying that the USSR perceived a power decline and reacted

accordingly, first stepping up efforts and then giving in (Wohlforth 1994-95), a claim now supported with a turn to political economy (Brooks and Wohlforth 2000-01). Still, this leaves a lot unexplained for understanding the extent of Soviet retrenchment (Kramer 2001), let alone about the origins of the Soviet legitimacy crisis in the 1980s. Another interpretation shared by those who conceive of the international system as a social construct in which governments behave on the basis of their self-identification will point to the non-material causes that pushed the USSR to change policy (Wendt 1992; Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994). In fact, the "New Thinking" opened many diplomatic avenues, earlier forestalled, simply by ignoring the in any case illusionary military threat from the West. Still others will emphasise domestic politics, that is, the fact that it was only after the end of the Cold War, and not for any international anarchy or great power competition that the USSR disintegrated, but through the emerging Russian nationalism used by Yeltsin in his power competition with Gorbachev.

The assumptions which inform the interpretation are crucial for both the actual explanation of events and for policy advice. The interpretation of such crucial events constitute the "lessons" of history which then inform the judgement of many policy-makers. The example of the Great Depression might be useful here. For economic observers (Kindleberger 1973/1987), the Great Depression is mainly remembered because it showed the negative effect of closing markets off from international trade. Because countries did not work together to keep their markets open, their "beggar-thy-neighbour" policies only pushed the problem over to the next country from which, after a cycle, it would inevitably return in an exacerbated form. These lessons focus on the level of the international economy and on the efficiency of markets. More politically oriented observers will remember the Great Depression for the political turmoil which could only be stopped by inventive state strategies, such as the first Swedish social democratic experiments and the "New Deal" (Strange 1998). If not countered, countries were ripe to fall into the hands of populist regimes, some of the worst sorts. Whereas the first vision, correctly, claims that state intervention in international markets deepened the depression, the second vision, equally correctly, would argue that state intervention was key in avoiding a turn towards authoritarian regimes in some countries (which would actually have been even more interventionist). These lessons still inform some of the debate about globalisation today. Defenders like Gilpin (Gilpin, with Gilpin 2000) point to the risks of protectionism (as if globalisation were mainly about trade). Even moderate critiques like Strange (1986; 1998), however, point to the necessity to "cool the casino", to manage "mad money".

Indeed, these ideas might bring about the very things they wish to portray or avoid. For a long time, peace researchers have been arguing that realism was a self-fulfilling prophecy.[7] If all other governments assumed that Germany was prone to return to a more irredentist policy after its reunification, an argument forcefully defended by Mearsheimer (1990), then their policies might have isolated Germany to such an extent as to provoke a more assertive and aggressive Germany.[8] If all governments assumed that the next big conflicts are "clashes of civilisation" (Huntington 1993), then their behaviour, opposing policies on the basis of a supposed threat to one's own culture, might well trigger ethnic/cultural conflicts which would not otherwise have

appeared — besides justifying "ethnic cleansing" as the only rational way to solve the multicultural "problem".[9]

The Educational Argument: Teaching Future Practitioners

Exactly because data does not speak for itself, because all observation is theory-dependent, and because observation can in itself have an effect on this very reality it is supposed to describe, it is fundamental that observers of international relations, whether practical or academic, be trained to become aware of their own and others' assumptions. As seen in the previous discussion on the end of the Cold War, these are highly significant questions for academia and politics. For this, they must understand both the explanatory and the constitutive functions of theories.

Nearly everybody agrees that teaching the explanatory or instrumental function of theory is important. For many scholars, this is basically the only path to theorising, its sole legitimisation. On the basis of case studies and comparative research, the discipline develops so-called middle-range theories. These are explanations for which one might be able to specify (scope) conditions under which they will with a certain probability apply to specified cases. They can also be used as tentative tools for policy advice. There, careful use of these models can produce a series of scenarios. It is through this ability of theories that science is usually considered "useful".

But IR is no different to any other social science: these explanations are often limited. Not only do we lack a general theory of international relations or foreign policy: we can give no "eternal advice" to the prince, as Aron (1962) already admonished. But given the amount of variables, and here the social sciences differ from the natural ones, we either tend to make reductionist explanations by concentrating on too few, or must refer to causal complexes without being able to disentangle the host of possible explanations. Forecasts are often nothing more than educated guesses. As Grosser (1972) once put it, political scientists are only able to tell afterwards why things had to happen that way (why a particular scenario was realised). Hence, if conceived similarly, and compared, to the natural sciences, IR theory frequently remains a very blunt instrument.

Nonetheless, there is another important utility in teaching theories in their explanatory function. It is a first step on the road to see the important constitutive function of theories. Insofar as this teaching emphasises the relationship between the event and its explanation, it helps to sharpen our mind on the way these very theories have been constructed. This is extremely important for learning to work theoretically, and to make this work more precise, a point on which again the majority of scholars would agree.[10] In other words, such teaching is meant to develop the capacity of students to train in clear thinking. As a first step, students must be made aware of the very difficult, but crucial, step of concept formation: why do we take which concepts for which type of empirical analysis? What is the cost of choosing one concept over another? Then, students could be made aware of how such concepts are used for the explanation of events. That is, they could get a sense of how interpretivist historians work, how they construct and defend their claims. Finally, they could try out making an inverted research design of other works before trying it out for themselves.

Looking at it in this way, we have already *de facto* reached the constitutive function of theories. This methodological understanding which stresses the problems of the crucial initial step of concept or ideal-type formation falls within the classical Weberian tradition.[11] Social science methodologies that skip this part, like King *et al.* (1994), tend to paper over the differences between naturalist and interpretivist approaches. By unproblematically using concepts, their positivistic research design takes for granted that which actually carries the most weight in interpretivist explanations.[12]

One of the obvious merits of teaching the constitutive functions of theory underpins the above-mentioned qualification and was already covered in the previous section. There, we saw that concepts and conceptual frameworks are "the condition for the possibility of knowledge" as Immanuel Kant put it. Moreover, we met the basic social constructivist tenet that ideas about social events and those very social events can interact. Of course, students must be made aware of this.

But there is a second, apparently more far-fetched argument in taking the teaching of constitutive theories very seriously: its practical use for international politics. Learning theories is a means for acquiring skills that are crucial for diplomacy. Let me support this claim by making a little detour.

Any knowledge at any given time is bound to be limited. Our knowledge today is prone to change over the next couple of years, and certainly over the next decades. Yet, students as future practitioners will have to be knowledgeable over time. Hence, they must be trained in their capacity to assimilate and produce knowledge on their own. They must be intellectually independent by the time they leave university. Acquiring intellectual independence implies not merely practical knowledge about where to find information in the future, but the capacity to auto-correct one's knowledge. For this, being aware of one's assumptions, and how they relate to understanding, is absolutely fundamental. In other words, theoretical self-awareness is crucial for having the flexible and knowledgeable mind necessary to adapt to new and different practical circumstances. It is for this aptitude that traditional diplomacy often relied on classical education in the past and that many business firms in Western Europe have started to systematically recruit some of their staff from the so-called soft social sciences, and not only from law, economics or management. The same, of course, applies to public administration.

Yet there is an even closer link to diplomacy. Besides the necessary technical skills (law *etc.*) mainly necessary for the consular functions of foreign offices, other foreign office positions still have a touch of classical diplomacy. This applies in particular to the sections on information, some representational functions and, of course, all negotiations. There, diplomats are responsible for providing politically relevant interpretations about significant events in other countries, or for directly managing the relations between countries.

The classical education for these more diplomatic positions includes some training directly offered by the foreign offices, *i.e.* a form of in-house socialisation. Usually, accepted candidates undergo two years of courses and then qualify for their jobs. But such an approach presupposes the very existence of a foreign policy tradition. This is not an obvious option for new countries that often have to build up their foreign offices from scratch. Moreover, it assumes that socialisation is up to date with the way international diploma-

cy is run today or that it has strategies for correcting itself.

In countries with little in-house socialisation, universities take over part of this task. This happened in the US particularly after 1945, when the country's elite became even more self-conscious of its role in world politics, then during the days of the Princeton Professor turned President, Woodrow Wilson. The US academic solution after the World War II, as most forcefully represented by Morgenthau (1948), consisted of proposing a set of rules to follow in foreign policy-making which could be scientifically deduced from eternal laws (to be found in human nature). Science, not the clubby in-house socialisation was the answer. However, whereas in the past some might have believed that there is a science of foreign policy whose tools we simply have to apply, these certainties have withered. As a result, today we cannot simply propose a deductive science for the future diplomat, even if we have made progress in some domains.

Hence, some countries might find themselves facing the lack of both any history of their foreign office for socialising future diplomats, and of any deductive theory of diplomacy. So how do we train diplomats (not the consular clerks) and foreign policy specialists? Despite all the fuss about the science of foreign policy, the US experience shows clearly that another type of expertise has proved crucial. Faculties have developed huge area study programmes. The basic rationale was obvious. In order to better understand the world, people learnt the language and culture of other countries, coupled with some social science tools. Not some ready-made scientific laws, but some contextual knowledge was the answer.

Here, teaching the constitutive function of theories and, more precisely, teaching how different understandings might exist at the same time can fulfil a crucial learning function, similar to that in learning languages/culture: it prepares one for cross-cultural understanding and communication. To some extent, learning *via* philosophy/meta-theory different theoretical languages can substitute some of the heuristic functions of learning real languages in cultural studies.[13] Such an approach can have an economic appeal as well: in the absence of the means necessary to fund expensive international field studies and area specialisations, one simply needs some books — and mainly brains.

Moreover, teaching theory contributes to developing negotiating skills. For students are led to think as if they were explaining something from different points of view. They have to put themselves into a theoretical frame and produce explanations accordingly. Most importantly, when discussing with other students who might not share their interpretation, they have to learn how to make their own argument palatable to their opponent, to translate their ideas into the theoretical language of the other. It makes students able to decipher the other's position in terms of their assumption, and to respond by using this knowledge. They can therefore anticipate reactions more quickly.

Such skills make for a more reflexive process of communication that should reduce misunderstandings. These are hermeneutical skills that are crucial for the observing and acting diplomat. If acquired, they are more time-proven and will be useful for any practitioner when some other form of knowledge has become outdated. In that regard, theoretical discussions are fundamental for developing the intellectual maturity of future actors in international affairs.

The golden rule of diplomacy is not to impose one's visions on the opponent but

to change their preferences so as to make them compatible with one's own. This assumes good hermeneutical skills. Similarly, Kissinger used to complain about the recruitment of lawyers and business people to the State Department, exactly because they lacked this capacity to translate into different environments taking the world as one. Problems are treated *ad hoc* with little historical distance: 'Nations are treated as similar phenomena and those states presenting similar immediate problems are treated similarly' (Kissinger 1969:33). Instead, Kissinger asked for more historical but also nation-specific knowledge. He called for acquiring a non-technical understanding of events, which requires an intellectual distance he himself achieved through his own M.A. thesis which was on the "meaning of history" (nothing less), that is, in political theory, if not philosophy.

A Political/Academic Argument: Getting Out of the Periphery

A final, more obvious yet perhaps less important argument in favour of teaching theory in IR has to do with the research agenda in IR. To put it crudely: IR (and increasingly more specialised studies on the European Union) has become a fully-fledged social science whose debates are basically driven by theory. Contributions are judged on their ability to advance more general knowledge that can be made accessible to a wider audience. Theory is part and parcel of all articles in the leading journals of the field: *International Organization*, *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *World Politics* (for the US), as well as the *European Journal of International Relations*, the *Journal of Peace Research*, *Millennium*, the *Review of International Studies*, and the new *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*. And this seems justified in the light of the arguments given above.

Theoretical strength has become an indicator of defining an academic core and an academic periphery. Let Germany and Italy serve as examples. Germany's academic IR community, although quite numerous, had no single anonymously peer-reviewed journal in its field until 1994. By that time, the IR section of the German Political Science Association decided to get rid of some of the classical feudal features of any purely cooptative, rather than meritocratic, academic system. It created the *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, which has met with an impressively quick and resounding success. Big shots see their articles refused. Lesser known figures become part of a more general debate. Whereas the traditional IR elite was already quite open to theoretical research (*e.g.* Czempiel, Senghaas, Krippendorff),[14] by now the journal displays articles of a theoretical density fully competitive with any major international journal — a richness sustained by the mainly younger generations in the field. The German debate has moved out of the semi-periphery in which it found itself for quite a time. It did so by creating an internal intellectual dynamic and by connecting its findings to the core of research abroad. There was no way to do this without independent research on theory.[15]

This is not quite the situation of IR in Italy. In a recent study, Lucarelli and Menotti (2000) draw a rather critical picture of the Italian scene. There is, relatively speaking, little theoretical work in its widest sense, *i.e.* including those works which explicitly link theoretical models to empirical material. The most remarkable data is, perhaps, the number of Italian authors who have published in

leading international journals. Defining an Italian scholar as one who works in Italy or is part of its academic community, there are only two people who have published in total four articles. For comparison, it would be easy to fill pages with German or Scandinavian names. Although there are journals of good, if mixed, quality like *Teoria Politica*, there is non really anonymously and internationally peer-reviewed journal. The debates go through the big names.

Now one could say that it is not necessarily a sign of being peripheral if the academic community does not publish in international journals. Some academic communities that used to happily publish at home only (given that their internal circles were big enough) were very much part of the international stage, because other communities referred to their work. French philosophy and sociology could serve as examples. Even if we grant that this could be a temporary possibility it is, however, quite natural to resume the link to the international level — a link which has passed necessarily *via* theoretical exchanges. Having no link for quite some time, in either direction, like in Italy, still seems to be a problem.

Still, one could reply that it is perhaps not disastrous if some academic communities do not torture their brains by following the latest intricacies of the "relative *versus* absolute gains" debate or similar theoretical research in IR. An academic periphery might serve as a good protective shield, in the way that poverty was often the best monument preserver during the European Baroque. There is undoubtedly some truth to this. Yet after so many years one needs something worth preserving, something up to the standards of later times. Moreover, moving out of the periphery does not imply that one has to imitate everything. As Zürn (1994) so nicely put it in the opening issue of the *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 'We can do much better! *Aber muß es auf amerikanisch sein*?' Both the dynamic of the Scandinavian and German debates have rejuvenated a Continental debate which, although obviously neglected in the US (Waever 1998), is now well alive and kicking (Jørgensen 2000). This renewal has been accompanied and reinforced by the establishment of a new (since 1995) and internationally peer-reviewed journal of very high quality, the *European Journal of International Relations*, first edited in Uppsala (Carlsnaes) and now in München (Kratochwil).

All of these points seem perhaps trivial to many, but these experiences are important for those countries which are still defining their place in the international division of academic labour, such as the new, and sometimes not so new, academic communities in Central and Eastern Europe. And here the picture seems often similar if not worse than in Italy. Whereas theoretical panels are very prominent in the Western European conference life, such as in the pan-European (well ...) ECPR (European Consortium for Political Research) Standing Group on IR meetings, only the last conference of the CEEISA (Central and East European International Studies Association) included some theoretical research.

Some of the reasons mentioned for this remarkable lacuna are that young or poor countries must focus on their most immediate technical needs. It seems undeniable that some new technical expertise is warranted. I hope that the two earlier sections have shown that any neglect of theoretical work would be short-sighted, though. Moreover, since future teachers have to be trained, theoretical requirements are even more important since, without it, no academic work (including Ph.D.s!) of an international standard can be expected.

Indeed, there is a risk in the relative comfort the semi-periphery provides. Academic communities, for instance in Central and Eastern Europe, might simply accept the position in which the international division of academic labour will try to slot them, namely one in which they teach and research only on their particular region, passively relying on theories invented by somebody else (or worse, without even any theoretical background which would make them able to relate to other phenomena). The risk is great that scholars will be content with filling out those chapters where "regional expertise" is needed. "The view from ..." litters book chapter headings like titles in United Nations reports. Ph.D. theses will be guided by these requirements mainly. Even in Germany, many Ph.D.s are financed through research projects that rarely extend to fundamental research. As a result, quite a few young Germans see little other way than to graduate in the United Kingdom or the US.

Such a position risks cementing the semi-periphery. Let us, for the sake of drama, express this in crudely economic terms. Knowledge follows, to some extent, a similar path as other products in international trade. Countries are, of course, free to specialise in raw materials, but the history of international trade has shown that there are limits to this. Exchanging their goods, these countries have come to know a dependence on international technology and tastes. Usually their prices are driven down compared to high value-added goods with a high knowledge component. In particular, Japan stands out as a country which found out that it is simply not enough to copy things, as one must also understand the logic of production. Instead of being a technology-taker, one should be a trend-setter in new technologies. Know-how also derives from basic science, hence the latter simply cannot be disregarded, neither in telecommunications, nor in academic production. Of course, that takes time. But it does not happen if one never starts. Without acknowledging the need for theory, and without developing the possibility for theoretical studies to develop, academic communities risk staying or becoming simple theory-takers (*i.e.* passive knowledge consumers) and mere data-providers.

A Practical Note on Teaching IR Theory

This conception of the significance and role of theories in IR is not inconsequential for its actual teaching. There are some obvious points. Since all empirical analysis, and all history, implies theoretical assumptions, one really cannot do applied studies first and theory later. Consequently, it makes little sense to wait for meta-theory/theory-content in courses of later semesters, although the type of course may differ. Also, since seminars are to be geared towards perspectivist thinking and theory-translation, the seminar leaders themselves must be competent in a variety of different approaches. In a similar vein, instead of a curriculum in which there has been a division of theoretical spheres of influence with little exchange in-between, it is preferable to have several courses which in themselves try to make people think on the basis of a variety of approaches, although the preference of the seminar leaders will differ.

Since the foregoing discussion has stressed the importance of the constitutive function of theories, I will not deal with the majority of courses that have a necessary theoretical content, but which are not specifically geared towards preparing students for theoretical think-

ing.[16] Instead, I will focus on those courses that more explicitly tackle the constitutive function of theories. These more theoretical courses are concerned with the way explanations are constructed. They must discuss the assumptions upon which middle-range explanatory theories are built. In other words, these courses must discuss meta-theories (of course not exclusively). There is no finite list for teaching the inter-relationship between meta-theories and theories in IR. Also, teaching should follow the needs of particular students and there is little generalisation that can be offered. Still, some patterns can be discerned.

There are perhaps four basic ways of combining theory/meta-theory in a course. The most classical way, at least on the European continent, would be *via* a history of thought. Strangely enough, this is rarely done. There are two basic strategies for such an approach. One can either refer to the philosophical forerunners of international theories, or limit oneself to the theoreticians that were prominent in the field that became institutionalised as a discipline after the World War I. In Western dominated IR, such a course then tends to be structured around the so-called four great debates (realism-idealism, scientism-traditionalism, realism-globalism, rationalism-constructivism), but that can be enriched by local references. The advantage of such an approach is that it introduces some of the peculiar IR language to students (security dilemma, balance of power, national interest), all its pitfalls, as well as some methodological issues in a "chrono-logical" manner. Moreover, if presented in a sociological way, students get some insight into the relationship between world political events and theoretical advances, *i.e.* they learn to put the production of knowledge into its social and historical contexts. The disadvantage is that the core will inevitable centre around realism in IR, and will hence not present the variety of approaches (as seen also in Guzzini 1998). Moreover, it can meet the incomprehension of students who might perceive this as an exercise in resurrecting mummified ideas, a kind of intellectual archaeology. Hence, it is important that links to contemporary affairs or debates be made throughout the course, something which is actually not that difficult.

A second approach, which works in a more straightforward analytical way, was prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, and not only in the West. It consists of presenting theory as a menu for choosing between clusters of assumptions bundled as schools of thought or paradigms. Let us call it the approach of the 'Inter-Paradigm Debate' (Banks 1985). There are some relatively famous books on realism, pluralism and globalism or similar titles.[17] This also applied to International Political Economy where, again, we were usually offered three choices: mercantilism, liberalism and structuralism/neo-Marxism (Gilpin 1975; Gilpin, with Gilpin 1987; Gill 1988). Such a didactic approach has some obvious advantages. It is logical in that it takes first what comes first: the underlying assumptions of all theories and observation. Also, it immediately does some homework for the student in that it shows that assumptions usually come in a cluster. Finally, it trains students explicitly in method. The usual game consists of asking students to explain an event in any of the theories, which means that students must understand how hypotheses are formulated and put up for empirical scrutiny.

There are a series of caveats to this second approach, however. One is the above-mentioned and often encountered confusion of ideologies with meta-theories. In other words, there exists the risk of taking these clusters in purely ideological terms. Yet, one should be well advised

not to confound realism/pluralism/structuralism with conservatism/liberalism/radicalism, as often done especially in the US (Gilpin, with Gilpin 1987). If conceived in such an ideological way, the course might have the opposite effect: instead of opening up for thinking, it closes down the path to debate. If diverging values are all there is, then the debate can easily turn into a show of verbal fists. Worse, in some settings, the intellectual exchange might never start since everybody feels entitled to stick to what they think anyway (and professors are always right). At this point, theory courses simply add one more to the list of compulsory hurdles later quickly forgotten. Also, students do not necessarily get the link between knowledge and the social environment in which it is produced (the mirror argument to the advantage of the first more historical technique). So the "Inter-Paradigm Debate" was perhaps best understood as a historical phenomenon, *i.e.* as an indicator of the self-understanding of a discipline in crisis, and less as a logical clash of incommensurable paradigms (Guzzini 1988; 1998).

The present discussion between rationalism and constructivism is preferable to the classical Inter-Paradigm Debate in that it focuses very well on the meta-theoretical differences.[18] In other words, it does not reduce meta-theory to an ideological factor. The meta-theoretical matrix on which it is built has, however, inconveniences of its own. The two most important are the fuzzy borders of some categories and the general evacuation of all normative debates (Guzzini 1998:190-235). Moreover, the disadvantage of teaching in this way is the "top-down" manner. Students previously unacquainted with the need to get some distance from the data presented to them will find it hard to make the theoretical-empirical link. Of course, teaching can help by using articles as examples, and so on. Similarly, small assignments that repeatedly ask to generate and compare explanations on the basis of different theories are helpful. Finally, newspaper articles can be used and compared to tease out the underlying assumptions. All this is relatively time-intensive, though, since the instructor has to give very thorough and frequent feedback to students. Hence, depending on the size of the class, the tasks of communication and learning control can prove difficult. To put it differently, such theory courses can hardly be lectures and do not work well in big settings.

A third way of teaching the constitutive function of theories is to take a central concept, like "power", "security", "world society" or "war", and then show how the meaning of such concepts, as well as their explanatory value, diverges from one meta-theoretical/theoretical context to another. For such central concepts, once they are made part of the vocabulary of an observer (applied or theoretical) they derive their significant meaning from the contexts in which they are embedded (Guzzini 1993). Also, depending on the concepts, this is a good way to refer to normative debates in IR.

The limits of such courses are similar to those met by the fourth type of enhancing the awareness of the constitutive function of theories, which explicitly starts from the empirical end. One way, for instance, would be to take an important international event, as *e.g.* the abovementioned "end of the Cold War". The seminar confronts different interpretations of the event. Then, it discusses the relative value of these interpretations on different levels: their empirical accuracy, their internal coherence, and finally the plausibility of the assumptions, both open and hidden, on which the explanation is based. The aim is to get students

interested in exploring these assumptions, and hence to ask theoretical questions. This way works by motivating students to think theoretically starting from an empirical theme.

The drawbacks of this way of teaching are that assumptions are hardly seen in context or in a bundle. It leaves a certain taste of *ad-hoc*-ness to it. Again, the teacher can try to remedy this by referring to the larger theories to which particular assumptions tend to belong. Without proper preparation, however, this strategy risks moving the discussion too early to a higher theoretical level. Still, such a course could be good at the early stages of a student life, trying to stimulate the necessary theoretical awareness — and might then be repeated in a more advanced way at a later stage.

Conclusion

This article has sought to oppose the often-encountered conflation between theory and academia on the one hand, and politics and practice, on the other. Indeed, it has tried to show that these distinctions are themselves particularly damaging since they reinforce the illusion that empirical studies can ever be divorced from theory, and that education in international affairs is a purely "professional" exercise that stresses mere knowledge and not reflexive skills. In other words, these distinctions hide the specific contributions of theory training for practitioners in IR.

I advanced three arguments for better assessing the significance and roles of teaching theory in IR. First, all empirical analysis implies theory. Theory is not something to be added later. Its awareness is not an "academic" enterprise, but actual politics. Second, in times of changing knowledge, the teaching of theory can help foster a more time-independent self-reflexivity and cultural and contextual awareness, in short, a form of intellectual maturity particularly useful for cross-national understanding, communication, and negotiation. Finally, and perhaps also for this reason, teaching and researching in theory, including fundamental research, has been a major ingredient in moving academic communities out of the (semi-)periphery.

I ended with a short note on actual teaching by identifying four classical types of courses. This was not meant to exhaust all the possible ways to raise the hermeneutical skills deemed necessary for future practitioners (in academia, journalism, economics or politics). Also, they should not suggest that this kind of course is all there should be. To the contrary, as mentioned above, it cannot replace a good training in basic processes and issues in international history, law, politics and political economy. Yet, as I simply wanted to stress, neither can applied studies replace such theoretical courses, relying perhaps more on sociology and philosophy. Nor does it appear that they would be "more important" to the future practitioners who will, as academics should have no trouble admitting, necessarily learn a good part of their applied trade while doing it.

There is perhaps an even more far-reaching implication of the argument. The call for more applied studies betrays a longing for a time when academia and politics spoke basically the same language. In the past, realism, or more generally the classical tradition, has been the bridge between observation and decision. This bridge was taken for granted, the language was natural. There was an easy coming and going between scholars and politicians. Today, the impression is that the language of academia has increasingly moved away from that of practice. Hence,

the call for re-importing the language of politics into academia.

But such a resurrection of the old united language is impossible to achieve in some countries by now. As practitioners have noticed themselves, there is no way back to the "natural" language of scholars and practitioners. It is this very self-awareness of needing competent translations that makes the return to a *status quo* very difficult. The realist or classical language and view of international affairs is no longer obvious in many countries. That is because realism or the parameters of the realist-idealist debate have in themselves become an object of study, exposing it as a set of practices which in itself influences the reality it is supposed to passively explain.

Therefore, it is also contestable whether this rapprochement should be done in this conservative way. Resisting this rising self-awareness and the exposure to academic distance with the excuse that the languages no longer fit is not an innocent move. It would have as an effect that the future elite, which might have been trained in these new professionalised academic environments, would itself stop speaking the old language of politics. For all the above does not imply that the link between academia and practice is lost forever. Rather, it has to be redefined. Practitioners can be self-reflective persons who are able to combine the old and new languages of practice and of observation, as diplomats have always been speaking different languages to different audiences. Academics should be able to include in the analysis the self-fulfilling effects that certain explanations can have. True, this implies a double socialisation. But instead of pursuing the conservative endeavour to paper over a unity lost, one might face the challenge of redefining it. It would not be difficult for constructivists to live with this commitment to self-reflexivity (Guzzini 2000a). The significance and roles of theory in teaching IR and researching international relations would be no matter for dispute.

First version received: July 2000.
Final version accepted: March 2001.

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This is a revised version of a paper presented at the training seminar 'Teaching European Studies and International Relations in East Central Europe' organised by the UNESCO Chair in International Relations and European Studies at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, 2-5 March 2000. For comments and suggestions, the author is indebted to the participants of this workshop, in particular Raimundas Lopata, Nortautas Statkus, and Gedeminas Vitkus, as well as to Kateřina Borutová, Barry Buzan, Lene Hansen, Ulla Holm, Pertti Joenniemi, Işil Kazan, Anna Leander, Ian Manners, Michael Merlingen, Karen Lund Petersen, Ulrich Sedelmeier, Ole Waever, Zlatko Šabič and two anonymous referees.

1 For recent assessments of the findings, see Vasquez (1987), Geller and Singer (1998).

2 Indeed, one should not forget that empiricism is a highly sceptical position which was born out of the criticism to derive knowledge from preconceived ideologies, instead of what there "really is" which, in turn, is what our senses, and only those, tell us there is. In the context of heightened ideological debate, like the Cold War, it was only to be expected that peace researchers found empiricist research methods attractive. Unfortunately, no amount of data

would have been enough to undermine the faith in *Realpolitik* (Vasquez 1983; 1998).

3 For a longer discussion, see Guzzini (2000a).

4 There are libraries written on this by now. Yet on the theoretical debate, see Lebow and Stein (1994), Wohlforth (1994-95; 1998), Lebow and Risse-Kappen (1995), Forsberg (1999), Lebow (1999), Patman (1999), Schweller and Wohlforth (2000), Brooks and Wohlforth (2000-01), as well as the exchange between Kramer (1999; 2001), and Wohlforth (2000).

5 In reality there is little debate about it, at least not in IR. Perhaps this simply shows the lack of trained historians in the field.

6 The more profound argument is that "power" is an indeterminate concept which cannot play the same role as money in economic theory. For that argument, see already Aron (1962:98), and Wolfers (1962:196). See also Baldwin (1989:25, 209) whose conceptual analysis shows that overall concepts of power, as used in classical balance of power theories are 'virtually meaningless'. For a discussion, see Guzzini (1993; 2000b).

7 For a US version, see Vasquez (1983).

8 See the exchange collected in Lynn-Jones (1991).

9 Much earlier, geo-politicians heralded population exchange as a rational tool for conflict resolution. See, for instance, Mackinder (1919/1944) reflecting on the Turkish-Greek treaty in 1923.

10 See the debate between Bueno de Mesquita (1985) and Krasner (1985).

11 See the long development of a conceptual framework which precedes his *Economy and Society* (Weber 1922/1980).

12 For this argument, see also Wendt's (1999:83-8) discussion about the difference between causal and constitutive theories and the importance of conceptual analysis.

13 Theoretical training can of course not entirely replace the exposure to different world-views and cultures. As such, it is relatively sad that many top politicians of the leading power of the day are not exactly known for their expertise in foreign languages and cultures. But theoretical training goes hand in hand with that exposure: being trained in the constitutive function of theories prepares the ground for a better understanding and use of the exposure to different cultures, exactly because there is a greater awareness of one's own values.

14 As an example for a much wider body of literature, see Senghaas (1972; 1987), Krippendorff (1975; 1977; 1985) and Czempiel (1981; 1989).

15 These theoretical contributions can be found (1) in the original debate between rational choice and communicative action in IR (a different take on the debate on rationalism and constructivism) by Meyers (1994), Müller (1994; 1995), Schneider (1994), Keck (1995; 1997), Risse-Kappen (1995), Schmalz-Bruns (1995) and now exported to the US by Risse (2000); see also the contributions to constructivism by Jaeger (1996) and Zehfuss (1998) and on action theory by Schimmelfennig (1997); (2) in the debate around democratic peace theory by Risse-Kappen (1994), Czempiel (1996a; 1996b), Moravcsik (1996) and Schmidt (1996); (3) or in the debate about globalisation and post-national politics (*e.g.* Brock and Albert 1995; Zürn 1997; Jung 1998; Schmalz-Bruns 1999; and the special issue by Grande and Risse 2000).

16 For instance, in a course on conflict resolution, one can teach middle-range theories that specify the conditions under which attempts at third-party mediation might be more successful.

17 For surveys of this triad, see Rittberger and Hummel (1990:23), and Waever (1996:153).

18 For the classical exposition, see Keohane (1988/1989) and Lapid (1989); for its present status, see Katzenstein *et al.* (1998) and Guzzini (2000a).

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